

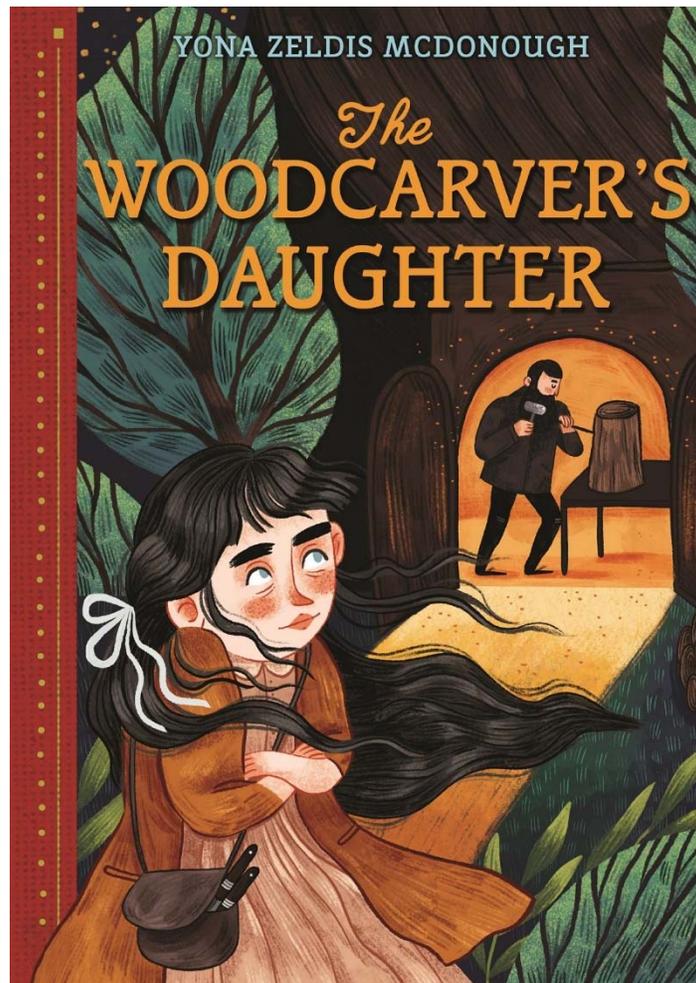
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This classroom guide for *The Woodcarver's Daughter* is designed for students in third through sixth grade. Teachers should feel free to adapt this material to meet the needs of their own students. The materials here cross disciplines, tapping into ELA, Social Studies and Art.

Brief synopsis: After a pogrom forces Batya's Russian Jewish family to leave their home and make the journey to America, Batya hopes her new life will offer her a chance to become a woodcarver like her beloved father. But while many things in America are different from the world of her shtetl, one thing seems to be the same: only boys can be woodcarvers. Still, Batya is determined to learn. With the same perseverance that helped her family survive and start over in an unfamiliar land, Batya sets out to carve a place for herself.

About the Author: Yona Zeldis McDonough is the author of over thirty books for children as well as eight novels for adults. Her chapter book *The Doll With the Yellow Star* won the Simon Wiesenthal **Once Upon a World** award and several of her other titles have been selected as Sydney Taylor notable books. Her books have also appeared on the Texas

Bluebonnet Award finalist list. She lives in Brooklyn, NY and is happy to do classroom visits, either in person or via Zoom.

BEFORE READING

A Book and Its Cover: Ask students to describe what they see on the cover. Have them identify clues in the cover art that suggest what the book is about. Help them to see that the man in the picture is using a hammer and a chisel, tools used by woodcarvers to turn blocks of wood into beautiful objects. Then ask: Why do you think the girl is shown outside the workshop? What does the expression on her face tell you about what she is feeling? What do you see in her purse? What do those tools tell you about what the girl wants to do next? After they have read the book, ask students to look at the cover again. Were their initial impressions right or wrong? Why?

Vocabulary: Direct students' attention to the Glossary on pp. 118-119. Have them scan the words and give them an opportunity to identify any words that might be familiar to them. Explain that many of the words come from Yiddish, a language used by Jewish people in central and eastern Europe at the time *The Woodcarver's Daughter* takes place.

Suggest that each time they come across one of the words in their reading, they consult the Glossary to confirm its meaning.

Identifying Words—Each chapter begins with a single word. Ask the students why they think those words are there. Write these chapter words on the board: *Wood, Fire, Silence*. Have students point to specific evidence in that chapter—phrases, sentences, ~~themes~~, scenes—that support the choice of that particular word.

DURING READING

Looking Beyond the Words: Display on a SmartBoard or overhead projector the following phrases from the story, or write them on the board:

"What did you and Mr. Moskowitz talk about?" I ask quietly.

"Shoptalk," Papa says. "Nothing too exciting." (p. 9)

Ask: Is Papa telling the truth? Did he and Mr. Moskowitz talk "shop" (talk about their work)? What did they really talk about? Why is Papa's first instinct to tell Batya a white lie?

Then display or otherwise draw students' attention to this line:

Papa might as well have asked us to climb on the backs of the honking geese and fly all the way to the moon. (p. 31)

Have students identify the kind of language used in this sentence. (figurative)

What is the meaning behind this use of figurative language, and why did the author choose to use it rather than directly state that Batya found the idea of moving to America hard to imagine?

Character Chart: Ask students to think what they know about Batya so far. On the board, copy the following chart and the example personality trait, as well as the textual evidence supporting that trait. Ask students to help you fill in the rest of the chart.

BATYA

Personality Trait	Evidence
rebellious	"Even though I know my parents wouldn't approve, I'm going to do it anyway" — p. 59

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Define Historical Fiction: How do fiction writers use history? How is it used in this story? Which events do you think are real? Why? Which ones are imagined?

As a class, create a timeline using the dates and events mentioned in the story. Assign small groups to do further research on some of the entries, such as World War I, pogroms, or the mass emigration of Russian Jews to the United States.

SETTING

The City: Have students make a list of the places or neighborhoods mentioned in the story, such as the Lower East Side, Coney Island and Central Park. Make copies of the attached contour map of New York City. Based on the clues in the story, have students label each neighborhood or place mentioned in the story.

Modes of Travel: Let students know that different types of details place readers in the setting of a story. For example, types of transportation can provide clues as to the time a story takes place. There are several ways the characters in the novel travel—by horse, by ship, by subway, by foot. How are these modes of travel the same or different from ones we use today?

Dealing with Disability: What happens to Batya's younger sister, Sarah? How does she react? How does the family deal with her? What is the resolution of her problem? Do you think it's a good solution? Why or why not?

AFTER READING

Story Theme: Which of the following best summarizes the overall theme, or central idea of *The Woodcarver's Daughter*? Why?

1. It is hard to leave the only home you know.
2. Persistence is needed to overcome challenges.
3. It is never a good idea to rebel against authority.

Persecution of Religious Groups: What is religious persecution?

What happens to Batya's family? What choice does it force them to make? Does this happen today?

Gender Discrimination: Batya is told girls can't join the woodcarver's guild and can't become woodcarvers. Are women still discriminated against in the workplace, or are men and women treated equally in every profession? Give your opinion and back it up with evidence.

Places to visit or explore virtually:

<https://www.tenement.org/>

<https://www.thecarouselmuseum.org/>

<https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/>

<https://www.nytransitmuseum.org/>

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